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SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/ETC, OES/STC AND AF/S  
INTERIOR FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: South African Government publishes draft regulations to ban "canned" predator hunting

REF: 04 PRETORIA 2001

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PROTECT ACCORDINGLY. NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

1. (U) Summary. In January, the South African Government (SAG) published for public comment a draft document on norms, standards and regulations relating to the management of predators, such as lions, leopards and cheetahs. The document lays out a national policy on the captivity and hunting of indigenous predators that reflects views of various stakeholders. The policy aims to eradicate the practice of "canned" hunting, which involves hunting and shooting of artificially lured, hand-raised and sometimes tranquilized predators, a practice animal rights activists and the SAG regard as unethical. Animal rights activists continue to voice serious reservations about the proposed policy. The Professional Hunters Association of South Africa (PHASA) has welcomed the SAG action, as it does not want to see the country's lucrative game hunting market tarnished by unethical canned hunting. End Summary.

#### Introduction

2. (U) In late January 2005, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) published a new draft policy, seeking public comment by March 15, 2005. The new policy on "norms, standards and regulations relating to the management of large predators" will be put into effect under the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 (NEMBA). DEAT's goal is to introduce the new rules from July 1, 2005. The policy will regulate the keeping in captivity and hunting of indigenous predators, including brown hyena, spotted hyena, cheetah, leopard, lion and wild dog. The policy intends to promote ethical hunting of predators, protect the genetic integrity of indigenous predator populations, regulate the exports and imports of predators, and ensure their sustainable use.

3. (U) Specific provisions of the draft regulations prohibit night hunting, the use of dogs, shooting from vehicles, using tranquilizers, and hunting in a pride situation. All predators in captivity will be tagged with a microchip, which will be paid for by the game farmers. DEAT will prescribe standardized procedures and characteristics for microchips and establish a database to house the information about the animals. Until now, each province relied on unique provincial ordinances to regulate wildlife hunting. For example, some provinces already dictate that hunted lions have to be in enclosures no smaller than 1000 hectares. The new policy will bring uniformity and consistency for all the provinces, although it continues to relegate some responsibility to provincial authorities, including for fencing and enclosure specifications for keeping predators in captivity.

4. (SBU) According to the DEAT official responsible for drafting the new policy, Dr. Pieter Botha, the policy aims to stamp out "canned" hunting, which involves the killing of captive-bred, human-fed predators, which are artificially lured by sound or scent, and cornered into small enclosures where escape is impossible. Canned hunting is a direct opposite of what the local professional hunters association refers to as the principle of "fair chase," hunting an animal raised in captivity but rehabilitated into the wilderness, free ranging for six months and feeding on wild prey. The SAG and animal rights activists agree that canned hunting is unethical and cruel to animals. DEAT is approaching the matter in all-inclusive way by seeking public comment and feedback to the draft document.

## Background--Media exposes canned-hunting practice

15. (U) In 1997 a local current affairs television program, "Carte Blanche," raised alarms about the plight of canned-hunted lions in South Africa. The program showed a hunter shooting and killing a captive-bred lioness in a small fenced enclosure, although it had three small cubs nearby and was evidently still lactating. The broadcast also stated that 400 lions per year, or more than one per day, were killed in the industry. The expose sent shock waves and triggered outrage throughout the country, resulting in animal rights activists demanding a ban on canned hunting. There was no uniform legislative regime in the provinces, and DEAT had no national strategy in place to regulate the practice. In response to the expose, DEAT called for a voluntary moratorium to stop canned hunting. DEAT's effort was not effective because the demand from overseas hunters remained strong.

16. (SBU) Raising predators in captivity and professional hunting are not illegal in South Africa, but the rate of increase of breeding facilities and canned hunting is alarming. A recent "Carte Blanche" broadcast that followed up on the 1997 segment estimated that between 1997 and 2004, over 2,500 lions were raised in captivity and destined to become trophies as a result of canned hunting. Game farmers sometimes buy off legitimate captive-bred predators and then organize canned hunting expeditions for their clients. The trophy hunters reportedly pay up to US\$20,000 to shoot a black-maned male lion. According to a Limpopo Province environmental department official, Mr. Fannie Coetzee, except for information brochures, there is no formal educational structure to help the hunters distinguish between "fair chase" and "canned" hunting. For this reason, he said, the legitimate game breeders should take greater responsibility to educate their customers.

## Critical views from wildlife conservationists

17. (SBU) Critics of the draft regulations are concerned that the document has too many loopholes and inconsistencies. For example, many clauses in the document still refer decision making to the provinces, in spite of the widely-varying rules and policies at the provincial level. It is also vague on defining the rehabilitation parameters in the wild, which is an important issue still handled by the provinces. The International Fund for Animal Welfare lambastes the policy for failing to address fundamental ethical issues and the welfare of predators in breeding facilities. The Wildlife Action Group, a local wildlife conservation organization, has raised concerns that the law broadens the scope of the large predators to include the highly endangered and extremely sensitive cheetah and wild dog, but still excludes exotic predators such as tiger and puma, which are already captive-bred in South Africa.

18. (SBU) Louise Joubert of SanWildlife rehabilitation sanctuary argues that while the hunting guidelines look good on paper, they will be difficult to enforce. She said it would be difficult for conservation officials to determine whether an animal has been free-ranging and self-sustaining for six months or even ethically hunted. Also, she believes that very few hand-reared lions can be successfully returned to the wild. Joubert is flatly opposed to captive breeding, because in her opinion it is linked to disease control problems, causes genetic degeneration, and is cruel to the animal. Garth Morgan, of the Democratic Alliance (an opposition party), questioned the seriousness of SAG's commitment to eradicating canned hunting given the eight years it has taken to develop its draft policy and regulations.

19. (SBU) Sonja Meintjies, a DEAT official involved with conservation policy, told EST Assistant that the reason for the government's delay was its limited legal authority in prevailing legislation. The SAG tried to address the issue by revising existing laws, which took several years to draft and finalize. The National Biodiversity Act of the National Environmental Management Act was finally promulgated in 2004 (Reftel). She said when DEAT called for a voluntary moratorium, it was hoping to discourage canned hunting from an ethical point of view, in the absence of a uniform national law. Meintjies said

that DEAT is aware of the challenges and criticism the new policy will face, which is why the Department solicited public comment. Responding to conservationists' concern that six months may not be sufficient to rehabilitate the predators in the wild, Meintjies acknowledged that the timeframe remains a subject of debate. Stakeholders have opposing views about the rehabilitation period in the wild. Based on information available to the policy's drafters, DEAT used the six month period, but the Department looks forward to receiving and applying informed and science-based comments to the draft document, according to Meintjies.

#### Hunting group supports government action

10. (SBU) Gary Davies, the head of the Professional Hunters Association of South Africa (PHASA), told EST Assistant that that United States holds the largest share of the hunting market at 50 percent per annum. Other hunters come primarily from Germany, UK and other parts of Europe. Davies said between 10,000 and 12,000 international hunters come to South Africa per year to hunt between 40,000 and 45,000 trophy animals. About 5,000 of these hunters are American. Davies said that this is a one billion Rands per year industry (approximately US\$170 million), one which PHASA does not want to see tarnished by unethical canned hunting activities--PHASA does not want to fall into disfavor with institutions like the Humane Society of the United States because of canned hunting.

11. (SBU) In the past few years, PHASA had requested the provinces to ban canned hunting and tighten licensing laws, but the process was very slow. PHASA requested this action to ensure that hand-reared predators would not be hunted for trophies, for fear of giving the entire hunting industry a bad name. Davies acknowledged that the new draft policy was no panacea to all the canned hunting problems, but the said move is a step in the right direction, and one his organization supports. He added that self-policing by the members of his organization and similar associations could be a useful option that could work better to address enforcement capacity, an anticipated challenge. According to PHASA, there are 9,000 game farms in South Africa strictly following good principles of hunting.

#### Comment

12. (SBU) The debate over hunting is emblematic of the balance that DEAT regularly has to strike between conservation and environmental protection, and economic growth and jobs. Although the policy is not yet finalized, it appears that DEAT has tried to address conservation-related concerns, and is open to further arguments made by conservationists. An additional challenge will be to educate and inform the foreign hunting market about the new restrictions and prevailing practices, to reduce demand for unethical and soon-to-be illegal canned hunts.

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